



FOR THE CHILDREN



DOWN MULBERRY LANE

By M. H. C.

ISOBEL hopped out of bed, ran to the window and pushed up the blind. Early as it was the bright sun streamed the morning world with its yellow light.

"O! good," she cried, and right away began pulling on her stockings and shoes, and tumbling somehow into her clothes.

For this was the day of the picnic, the day when mother was to take the five of them, Belle, Gretchen, Jane, Patty and herself on their first visit to the old grove far down the end of Mulberry Lane, where it had been decided that this day of gladness was to be spent. For one long week they had planned and chattered about it. Of course there would be a violet patch, and a dear little pebbly brook where one could paddle in bare feet and the sun didn't eat you up as it did on the beach. And a swing! Oh! there would be a swing, where two could sit together and touch the tree-tops with their toes.

And the day had come at last. Promptly at eleven they started, five fresh-starched, happy little maidens, running races, playing tag, tearing off and coming back all out of breath. Nurse warned them that it was their own little legs that must carry them home, for Belview beach wasn't like the city, and there were no cars or carriages to carry them in.

However, this didn't serve to dampen their spirits, and they gaily marched along, down the beach past the big club-house and soon out into the country road, into the shade of the spreading trees and away from the glaring noon heat of the beach.

"Let's call out to Sydney when we pass his house," suggested Belle, "and maybe if Mrs. Morris asks her,

Miss Myers will let him come along too."

So Sydney was invited to the picnic and everyone was glad when his aunt said that he might go along, for they all liked the little, dark-eyed lad who lived in the rose-covered cottage at the end of the lane.

It was Patty's sharp eye that first caught sight of the swing between the oaks. "I'll dare you to beat me," she challenged them, and away they went like a flock of young hares, leaving mother and nurse to follow at a more dignified rate of speed.

Then the fun began. Such a day as it was, and how good the lunch tasted that was spread for them under the big oak trees that grew just beside the brook. "I do believe," said Gretchen, "that this very spot we are sitting on now is where the wood fairies hold their revels. See how beautiful the moss is. Oh! do keep still everybody for a minute, shut your eyes and maybe we shall hear the tinkle of their voices."

There was silence for nearly ten seconds, and then Jane burst out with, "Why, I know what's the matter; it's Sydney. Fairies never come out when boys are around," and she looked reproachfully at him.

"Well, I think it's silly, anyway," said the little boy, "listening for fairies when I'm just starving."

Mother laughed merrily and thought the fairies had had taste not to like little boys, and that Sydney was right about the lunch, so they all turned their attention to the good things before them. It's wonderful how much better chicken sandwiches, apple tart, chocolate cake and ginger ale all taste when you eat them sitting on a mossy carpet with the blue sky for a roof and the trunks of the gnarled old oaks for your walls, than they do at any other time. But such is the case, as

Belle, Gretchen, Jane, Patty, Isobel and Sydney would everyone tell you if you were to ask them.

* * *

IT really didn't seem any time, though they were all hungry again, until tea was ready, then after that the packing up had to be done. This wasn't quite so much fun, for everyone was tired, and Pattie could not find her sunbonnet nor Sydney his ball. By the time they were all ready the sun was beginning his downward course into the sea, and the little bird's merry chirrup had a weary note.

"Hurry, children," Mrs. Morris told them. "I don't want your mammas to scold me for keeping their little girls out too late."

Just then Gretchen yawned noisily, and Jane said "O, you rude thing!" "Don't be cross, Miss Jane," nurse said. Then turning to Mrs. Morris, "I'm afraid if we don't hurry there is going to be trouble, ma'am. They're getting sleepy and cross already."

"Never mind, nurse, we're well on our way and it won't be long now," and Mrs. Morris took Jane's hand and gave it a squeeze. There was a tear in Jane's eye, for she didn't like being told that she was cross, although she knew it was true enough.

"Come, girls, I'll race you to the end of the lane," shouted Sydney, and with a whoop Isobel and Gretchen flew after him, not going to be outdone by a mere boy. But Gretchen lagged wearily before the goal was reached, and when Mrs. Morris and the others came up she was seated on the stump of an old tree and declared she couldn't go a step farther.

"Nurse will take your hand, dear," said Mrs. Morris, "and there is Sydney's house in sight already." But in spite of her cheery words she was really worried, for there was the whole length of the beach to be travelled yet and the children were getting more drowsy every minute.

Sydney's aunt was waiting for them at the gate and insisted that they should all come in and rest. Mrs. Morris thought it better that they should hurry on, but the sight of Jane's weary eyes and Gretchen's sleepy lids made her give way. "But it must be only for a minute, dears, and then we must be off again."

So they went in, and Sydney's aunt hurried off to get them each a cookie and a glass of milk. They were all thirsty, the milk was cool and refreshing and the cookie a flake of sweetness that melted like a dream. They all thanked Miss Meyers for being so good to weary travellers. "And now, we really must go," said Mrs. Morris, "their mothers won't know what has become of them." But when they went to look for Gretchen, there she was cuddled up in a big arm chair with Isobel squeezed in beside her, and the two of them fast asleep.

"Oh! children, how shall I ever get you home if you go falling off to sleep at this rate?" cried poor Mrs. Morris.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," suggested Miss Meyers, "we'll put the two of them in the big express wagon and you can draw them home."

"But I'm too tired to walk, too," wailed Jane and Bell together.

"Well, my dears, you can have the old carriage that Sydney rode in when he was a baby, and nurse will wheel you."

Sydney chuckled when he saw the funny sight they made when they



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